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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the nature of performance objectives and how they may be classified. Ways in which performance objectives may be used in improving instruction are elaborated on in sections on: (1) stating subject-matter and higher goals as performance objectives, (2) taxonomic classification of performance objectives, and (3) limitations and advantages of performance objectives. The report focuses on the interrelationship of instructional purpose, student behavior, conditions under which the behavior is to occur, and minimal criteria of acceptable performance. A bibliography is included. (RL)

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PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES IN FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TEACHING

By Renée S. Disick

DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

Until the late 1960's efforts to improve foreign-language instruction centered mainly on analysis of the teaching situation: What methods and texts produce optimum results? What are the characteristics of good teachers? What classroom conditions are most conducive to learning? Research along these lines, however, has failed to provide conclusive answers. The mere fact that teaching occurs does not guarantee that learning has also taken place.

Clearly, a new line of inquiry is needed. For this reason, interest has shifted from the process of foreign-language instruction to the measurable outcomes of that instruction. Attention centers less on the teacher and more on the learner. In the evaluation of instruction, the most pertinent question is no longer, "What has the teacher done?". Rather, it is, "What will the learner be able to do as a result of the instruction he receives?". These concerns have been especially important in the development of programmed materials and computer-aided instruction.

Pressures from several areas have lent added impetus to this movement. The "New Student" demands more individual attention to his particular needs; he wants courses relevant to him—now! Parents refuse to tolerate educational programs which fail to equip their children with the skills promised them. School boards and taxpayers are increasingly reluctant to approve growing education costs without measurable proof that their money is well-spent. The national government, too, has drawn tighter the post-Sputnik purse strings and insists that federally supported researchers be held accountable for their work.

In addition, the trend toward considering higher education as the right of every child has created an urgent need to find ways of educating all students. Screening out low-aptitude students can no longer remain the foreign-language teacher's privilege. Instead, finding ways of teaching both rapid and slow language learners must be his new challenge.

In view of these considerations, individualization of foreign-language instruction has become a necessity (9, 17).* But before teaching pace, methods, and materials can be made flexible, instructional goals need to be clearly formulated. One step toward accomplishing this is by implementing performance objectives in the foreign-language curriculum.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

This report will explain what performance objectives are and how they may be classified. Ways in which performance objectives may be used to improve instruction will then be discussed and some arguments for and against them set forth. Sources which treat at greater length each of the topics mentioned will be indicated where relevant to the text as well as listed in a bibliography at the end of the report.

*Numbers in parentheses refer to works listed in the bibliography.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES VS. GOALS

Performance objectives (also called "behavioral objectives" and "instructional objectives") differ from traditional goals, objectives, or purposes in two important ways. First, performance objectives are stated in terms of overt, measurable behavior. If learning is defined as a change in behavior, then it is difficult to determine if learning has occurred unless the new behavior is observed and measured. Second, performance objectives are stated in terms of desired student behavior, rather than teacher behavior. For example, the following purposes may not be considered performance objectives:

1. To teach the present tense of the verb Etre.

This purpose is stated in terms of teacher behavior. It does not communicate to students what they are expected to do.

2. To pronounce accurately.

Though this purpose is stated in terms of student behavior, it is vague; it does not indicate what will be pronounced, under what circumstances the pronunciation will occur, or how it will be evaluated.

3. To know the vocabulary in the lesson.

This purpose fails to indicate how students are to demonstrate their knowledge and how well they must "know" the vocabulary words.

The purposes listed above are too ambiguous to be useful in promoting learning. The vague wording leaves room for different student interpretations of what the teacher wants. In such cases it becomes as important to "know the teacher" as it is to know the course material. Conceivably, two or more teachers would differ on what behaviors may be considered as fulfilling these ambiguous goals. They could also disagree on how to evaluate student performance. Vaguely stated purposes are detrimental to learning since they fail to communicate clearly the teacher's expectations.

STATING SUBJECT-MATTER GOALS AS PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

The limitations of the purposes above may be overcome by rewriting them as performance objectives[7, 20] composed of these four parts:

1. Purpose–the reason to engage in the learning activities
2. Student Behavior–what the student must do to show that he has accomplished the purpose
3. Conditions–what the test and the test situation will be like
4. Criterion–the minimal level of acceptable performance.

For illustration, the three goals listed above will be restated as performance objectives. Each part of the objectives will be identified in parentheses.

1. To demonstrate knowledge of the present tense of the verb Etre. . . (Purpose)
   . . . write the appropriate form of the verb. . . (Student Behavior)
   . . . on a test of ten items such as: (Conditions)
   Je_____chez moi. . .
   . . . making not more than one error. (Criterion)
2. To demonstrate ability to pronounce accurately. . . (Purpose)
   . . . read aloud at least three sentences of recombined material. . . (Student Behavior)
   . . . in class. . . (Conditions)
   . . . without any phonemic errors, or errors in rhythm and intonation. (Criterion)

3. To demonstrate knowledge of the following vocabulary words (list attached). . . (Purpose)
. . . circle the correct synonym. . . (Student Behavior)
. . . on a 20-item test. Sample item: (Conditions)
Il est arrivé toute de suite. a) en retard b) immédiatement c) trop vite. No more than two errors are allowed. (Criterion)

STATING HIGHER GOALS AS EXPRESSIVE OBJECTIVES

Though many instructional goals can be set forth in the four-part format of a performance objective, there are others which are harder to state in this manner. For example, it may be difficult to specify exactly the student behavior, conditions, and criteria of subject-matter goals such as, "To speak the foreign language fluently," or "To analyze a work of literature." With higher level, more complex behaviors like these, statements regarding percentage of accuracy are often irrelevant. In oral communication objectives, for example, it may be hard to predict exactly when the behavior will occur, or what its precise nature will be. In some cases, the mere fact that it occurs at all may be taken as proof that the requirements of the objective have been fulfilled.

For these reasons, it is helpful to state subject-matter goals set for advanced student behaviors as open-ended, expressive objectives. Here, the student behavior, conditions, and criteria are expressed in a general rather than specific manner. In some instances, the conditions and criteria might even be omitted altogether. This allows for greater freedom in student performances as well as for more subjective appraisals of them.

Expressive objectives are also useful when determining affective goals—the attitudes, feelings, and values which students should develop as a result of foreign-language study. Affective purposes commonly set for students often include these:

1. To develop awareness of the foreign culture
2. To enjoy foreign-language class
3. To appreciate the foreign language and culture
4. To learn more on one's own about the foreign language and literature.

Some student behaviors which may be accepted as evidence that each affective purpose is being achieved might be, respectively:

1. The student keeps a scrapbook of news items related to the foreign country (or countries)
2. The student participates actively and willingly in all class activities
3. The student corresponds regularly with a foreign pen pal
4. The student voluntarily reads newspapers, magazines, and books in the foreign language.

Affective goals are a necessity in foreign-language courses. Unless teachers specify behaviors which demonstrate the achievement of affective goals, and unless they develop ways of determining this accomplishment, it is hard to know if the desired changes in student attitudes, feelings, and values are really occurring. Since affective goals such as those mentioned above are often presented as prime justifications for studying foreign languages, it is necessary that teachers state these goals in terms of student behavior and measure student achievement of them (12, 20).

TAXONOMIC CLASSIFICATION OF PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

Performance objectives vary considerably in the types of behavior they prescribe. Subject-matter goals range all the way from mechanical repetition to liberated self-expression. Affective goals progress from passive awareness to active leadership in foreign-language study. In view of the sequential nature of language learning, it is helpful to classify the objectives for each area in ascending order from the simplest to the most complex stages or levels of behavior. Such a classification system is called a taxonomy, a term originally used to designate biological classification of all life.

Taxonomic classification of foreign-language objectives is useful in the improvement of instruction. It can help a teacher determine the stage of behavior at which his teaching is aimed. Are his students engaged solely in the early stages of memorization and drill, or do they also have opportunities for more advanced free-expression? Do his students perform only the minimum of assigned work or do they seek out opportunities for additional independent study? Once a teacher determines the stage at which his students are functioning, he can then set objectives which lead them toward higher behaviors. He can also find out if his goals relate solely to the subject-matter or if his teaching also aims to develop positive attitudes, feelings, and values toward the foreign language and culture. Finally, taxonomic classification of test items permits a teacher to determine if his tests are appropriate measures of the skills his students have developed.

There is no one right way of classifying objectives and several systems have been proposed. One of these devised specifically for the subject-matter and affective goals of foreign-language teaching is presented in Valette and Disick(20).

SOME APPLICATIONS OF PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

Taxonomically classified performance objectives can improve instruction by facilitating communication between the people involved in the educational process: teachers, students, administrators, school boards, and local and national governments. Well-defined performance objectives enable a teacher to let his students know what is expected of them. Students are given a precise idea of what will be tested, how it will be tested, and how well they must do in order to pass. In this way, considerable anxiety is removed from the teaching situation. Furthermore, since students understand why they must do certain assignments, performance objectives work to increase student motivation(4).

Performance objectives also play a central role in the creation of criterion-referenced tests. Whereas norm-referenced tests rank all students according to a pre-fixed normative standard, criterion-referenced tests show whether or not students have achieved a specific knowledge or performance capability toward which the teaching has been directed(18, 19). Rather than "failing" the slow learner, criterion-referenced tests determine which students have succeeded in acquiring a certain skill and which need additional practice so that they too may eventually pass when re-tested.

Teaching for mastery is another possible application of performance objectives(14). Under this system a teacher does not begin the new material until ninety percent of the class has achieved at least an eighty to ninety percent mastery of each objective. In view of the wide range of learning time which different members of the class would need before reaching this standard, con-

siderable individualization of instruction is necessary. Once a student achieves this performance standard, he may be freed to work independently. Conversely, the slower student is given more time to master the objective.

Continuous progress, a further development of this idea, allows each student to advance as far as he can as fast as he is able with his promotion based on demonstrated achievement, not on time spent sitting in a classroom. If individualization of instruction is to become a reality, however, then the traditional, lock-stepped nature of most schools needs to be altered radically and new techniques need to be developed for informal, or "open-classroom" instruction(2, 11, 16, 20). Furthermore, student involvement in the selection of individual course goals offers a promising way of making foreign-language study more relevant to the needs of today's learners.

A curriculum based on performance objectives can help alleviate many of the problems of articulation between different schools and different levels. Students would move on to the next level only if they had mastered the skills specified for their present level. By administering pre-tests at the beginning of the school year, teachers can ascertain which skills each new student already possesses and which ones he may need to review(1, 5, 13, 15).

Performance objectives can make possible the educational accountability increasingly being demanded of school programs. Since instructional goals are stated in terms of student behavior, it is relatively simple for administrators, school boards, taxpayers, or other interested parties to determine from student performance whether or not schools are teaching effectively and are accomplishing the purposes they have set for themselves.

Finally, performance objectives are useful in training foreign-language teachers. Several teacher-training institutions have developed lists of behaviors which candidates must demonstrate before gaining admission to student teaching. In addition, there has been a growing trend toward establishing performance objectives which student teachers must achieve before receiving state certification(8,20).

LIMITATIONS AND ADVANTAGES OF PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

No new idea in education can possibly be worth its paper and ink unless it is vehemently opposed. Performance objectives are no exception to this rule. Some of the arguments for and against them are summarized below(3, 10).

Con	Pro
1. Specification of student behaviors results in long lists of trivial and picayune goals.	1. Though this is possible, it need not be inevitable. Intelligent use of expressive objectives and taxonomical classification can promote the formulation of high-level goals. In fact, the precision demanded in performance and expressive objectives can often facilitate clarification of abstract and sometimes meaningless goals.
2. The emphasis on observable, measurable behavior neglects abstract, humane values which cannot be measured.	2. Unless higher orders of behaviors are specified, teaching will not progress from the memorization of facts toward more advanced, creative activities. Though some goals are indeed hard to measure with precision, subjective judgments are nevertheless being made constantly in the classroom. Surely, it

would be helpful to students if the criteria for these judgments were communicated to them.

3. Performance objectives lead to rigid, standardized education in which machines take precedence over people.

3. Though it is true that performance objectives are needed for programmed instruction, this is not their only use. While performance objectives can lead to mastery of basic skills, expressive objectives can facilitate the development of original and highly creative activities.

4. It is unsound to teach toward a test.

4. Toward what else <u>can</u> you teach? If teacher-made tests are reliable measures of both simple and complex behavioral goals, then there is every reason to direct class activities toward them.

5. These new-fangled ideas won't work.

5. First of all, they <u>have</u> worked for many students and teachers. Second, are the current achievements in foreign language instruction so impressive that one can afford to be complacent and not even <u>try</u> a new approach?

6. A teacher need not justify his actions or be accountable to anyone for the learning which he produces. Performance objectives represent a threat to academic freedom and the sovereignty of the teacher in his classroom.

6. The purpose of education is to teach students, not to protect monarchies. Like members of other professions, teachers need to be held responsible for the quality of their work. Performance objectives offer the possibilities of pride in one's accomplishments and recognition of superior teaching efforts.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Educational goals stated in terms of formal performance objectives must specify the instructional purpose, student behavior, conditions under which the behavior is to occur, and minimal criteria of acceptable performance. In expressive objectives, these items may be stated generally rather than specifically, and the conditions and criteria may, in some cases, be omitted entirely. Classification of objectives and test items according to subject-matter and affective taxonomies enables a teacher to determine the behavioral stage of his goals as well as the validity of his tests. This can lead to the development of higher orders of behavior as well as performance measures which reflect accurately what has been taught.

The use of performance objectives can lead to the improvement of instruction by providing a means of communicating clearly to all those interested in a teaching situation exactly what the outcomes of instruction are to be. Specific applications of performance objectives include criterion-referenced testing, teaching for mastery, a performance-based curriculum, and individualization of instruction.

While performance objectives offer considerable promise for increasing the effectiveness of foreign-language teaching, more research is needed in the areas of both theory and practice before definite conclusions can be drawn. Hopefully, some of these answers will be provided in the next few years.

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